

# Tswa language

**Tswa** (*Xitswa*) is a South-Eastern Bantu language in Southern Mozambique. Its closest relatives are Ronga and Tsonga, the three forming the Tswa–Ronga family of languages.

Tswa is mainly spoken in the rural areas west of Inhambane. Its largest dialect, Hlengwe, extends westwards to Southern Zimbabwe; Maho (2009) considers this to be a distinct language. The other principal dialects are Dzibi (Dzivi) and Dzonga. According to some estimates, there are just over one million BaTswa, but not all can speak the Tswa language. Many Mozambicans, including census officials, often consider it a dialect of Tsonga.

Contents
<b>Alphabet</b>
<b>Basics of grammar</b>
Noun class system
Verbal systems
Grammatical Peculiarities of Linguistic Interest
<b>References</b>

## Alphabet

Tswa uses a variant of the Latin alphabet previously used for Tsonga. It is partly based on those developed by the Portuguese colonists and Methodist missionaries to the region. The first major transliterator for the Tswa language into English was the Swede J. A. Persson, who consolidated the alphabet for Tswa specifically.

Tswa	
<i>Xitswa</i>	
Native to	Mozambique
Native speakers	1.2 million <span> </span> (2006) <sup>[1]</sup>
Language family	<div>Niger–Congo <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li> Atlantic–Congo<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Volta-Congo<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Benue–Congo<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Bantoid<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Southern Bantoid<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Bantu<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Southern Bantu<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Tswa–Ronga<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Tswa</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	tsc
Glottolog	tswa1255 ( <span>http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/tswa1255</span> ) <sup>[2]</sup>
Guthrie code	S.51,511 <sup>[3]</sup>
Linguasphere	99-AUT-da ( <span>http://linguasphere.info/?page=linguacode&amp;linguacode=99-AUT-da</span> ) (shi-Tswa) incl. varieties 99-AUT-daa...-dae + 99-AUT-db (shi-Hlengwe) incl. varieties 99-AUT-dba...-dbb

Letter:	A	B	C	D	E	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	Ñ	O	P	R	S	Ŝ	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	Ž
Value:	a	b–β	tʃ	d	e~ε	g	h	i	dʒ	k	l	m	n	ŋ	ɔ~o	p	r	s	ʃ	t	u	v	w	ʃ	j	z	z̥

Ŝ and Ž are lightly whistled. The letter Q is sometimes used in words imported from Zulu, in which case it is pronounced in various ways, the clicks of Zulu not being native to the Tswa language. There are also several compounds, which include lateral fricatives.

Like most Bantu languages, all syllables end in vowels or nasals. Tone is important but is rarely written.

# Basics of grammar

---

Tswa is a Bantu language and thus has a noun class system and verbal system easily recognisable to Bantu speakers throughout Eastern and Southern Africa. In general the system is the same as in most Bantu languages. The following details are more specific.

## Noun class system

Instead of genders there are eight classes which have a similar but more complex role, where each noun begins with a class prefix as below:

Class Number	Singular	Plural	Uses
1	mu-	ba-	mainly nouns for people
2	mu-	mi-	impersonal objects
3	gi-	ma-	impersonal objects, particularly fruit
4	xi-	ži-	tools, means, languages, diminutives, defects, verbal nouns
5	yi-	ti-	particularly nouns for animals
6	li-	ti-	mental qualities, states of mind, verbal nouns
7	wu-	-	abstract nouns
8	ku	-	infinitives

## Verbal systems

Tswa verbs change according to status (affirmative/negative), mood (indicative/potential), aspect, tense, number, person and class. The usual three persons used in the Bantu group apply, and the first and second persons plural are maximally inclusive. The class link is usually written as a separate word, as in Tsonga and Ronga. Otherwise the paradigm is organised as follows:

### Affirmative

Indicative:

Present  
Present continuous  
Past  
Past continuous  
Perfect  
Pluperfect  
Future  
Future perfect

Potential:

Present  
Past  
Perfect

### Negative

Indicative:

Present  
Past  
Past continuous  
Perfect  
Pluperfect  
Future  
Future Perfect

Potential:

Present  
Past  
Perfect

## Grammatical Peculiarities of Linguistic Interest

Though Tswa does have a subjunctive, it does not change the standard '-a' at the end of a verb to an '-e' like most of the surrounding Bantu languages, unless it is used as an implied imperative in a dependent clause – a peculiarity it shares with the Tsonga and Ronga. The 'xi-' class, unlike its seeming equivalents in other languages, more closely mirrors the Nguni 'isi-' in that it has a strongly diminutive use.

## References

---

1. Tswa (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/tsc/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
  2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Tswa" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/lan/guoid/id/tswa1255>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
  3. Jouni Filip Maho, 2009. New Updated Guthrie List Online (<https://web.archive.org/web/20180203191542/http://gto.glocalnet.net/mahopapers/nuglonline.pdf>)
- 

Retrieved from "[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tswa\\_language&oldid=953257256](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tswa_language&oldid=953257256)"

---

This page was last edited on 26 April 2020, at 13:39 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.